

**PCC/UCLA Evaluation Partnership**

**Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation Final Report**

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# Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

This report involves a one-year study that assessed how students received the STACC program during its first full year of implementation. Work on the STACC program began in previous years and was fully implemented during the 2013 – 2014 academic year.

### Method

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered during the 2013 – 2014 academic year in an attempt to assess the impact of the STACC program on writing outcomes as well as to gather student level data about their experience in the program.

Students were administered a writing skills questionnaire at the beginning of the fall 2013 semester and again at the end of the spring 2014 semester to assess if students reported a change in writing outcomes after completing a year of STACC. Students were also surveyed at the end of each semester and focus groups were conducted at the end of the year to gather feedback regarding their experience in the STACC for the purpose of improving the program for the 2014 – 2015 academic year.

### Results

Results from the writing skills questionnaire indicated that students reported a significant change in their revising, feedback, and generating abilities from pre-STACC 100 to post-STACC 1A.

Results from the end of the semester surveys and focus groups indicate that most students' STACC experience was positive. They attributed this to many things including: their instructors, collaboration with peers, being in a cohort, structure of assignments such as gradually working to a final essay, free-writing, discussion boards, and self-improvement. Students noted a change in their writing and reading abilities.

Students indicated that the STACC courses were challenging and demanding and required a lot of time and effort. A majority of students indicated that they were able to keep up with required coursework but it was a challenge due to balancing work, personal, and other course commitments, but all students still expected to pass their courses.

### Conclusion

Overall, students had a positive learning experience in the STACC program and would recommend the program to other students. Some students identified certain areas for improvement, which are provided at the end of this document. Other students, however, said that STACC was great just the way it is and had no recommendations or suggestions for improving the program.

# Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

## INTRODUCTION

### Program Description

The Stretch Accelerated Composition program at PCC (also referred to as STACC) aims to “place reading, writing, thinking, and scholarship as the core content of English courses”. By changing the English course sequence and composition, and allowing students to self-select into an English course, the STACC program aims to increase access to and success in transfer-level composition courses, as well as to empower students as thinkers, and develop students’ critical literacies. Students complete two semesters of STACC curriculum, entering at the English 100 level for the first semester and completing English 1A at the end of the second semester. The two-semester format of the STACC program allows students to have the same instructor and classmates for both English 100 and 1A. The STACC program was fully implemented during the 2013 - 2014 academic year (AY) and a total of 18 sections were offered.

### Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to (1) assess the impact of the STACC program on writing outcomes, and (2) gather student feedback regarding their experience in the STACC program to identify the elements of STACC that are valuable and to identify elements that can use some revision.

### Evaluation Activities

#### *1. Assess the impact of the STACC program on writing outcomes*

Students were administered a writing skills questionnaire twice during the academic year – once at the beginning of the fall 2013 semester (pre-STACC 100) and a second time at the end of the spring 2014 semester (post-STACC 1A). The writing skills questionnaire contained six different writing domains: attitudes towards writing, generating, revising, feedback, collaborating, and awareness and control of the writing process. Survey data was analyzed to assess for pre-post differences across all six writing domains.

#### *2. Gather student feedback regarding their experience in STACC to identify elements of STACC that are valuable and to identify elements that can use some revision*

Students were surveyed at the end of each semester to get feedback regarding their experience in STACC, college in general, as well as ways in which the program could be improved. The end of the semester surveys contained closed-ended questions with the option of providing comments as well as open-ended questions.

In addition to student surveys, student focus groups were conducted during the last week of the spring 2014 semester. A total of four focus groups, from four different sections of STACC were conducted in an attempt to get more in-depth information

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regarding the student experience in STACC and the student college experience in general.

Lastly, informal conversations with STACC faculty identified some areas in which the STACC program can be improved for the 2014 – 2015 AY and are provided in the Recommendation section of the report.

## Writing Skills Questionnaire Results

### Introduction

In collaboration with the STACC project managers, it was elected to administer a writing skills survey at the beginning and end of STACC in an attempt to assess the impact of the program on writing outcomes. Students were administered the Writing Skills Questionnaire, taken from *A Community of Writers* by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff. The survey consists of 41 questions that comprise six domains: (1) attitudes towards writing, (2) generating, (3) revising, (4) feedback, (5) collaboration, and (6) awareness and control of the writing process. A brief definition of each domain is presented below:

- Attitudes towards writing – this domain includes three questions regarding how students feel about writing.
- Generating – this domain includes four questions regarding students' ability to generate new ideas, words, and thoughts when writing.
- Revising - this domain includes 11 questions regarding students' ability to revise a draft of their own writing (i.e., clearer sentences, better logic, revising main ideas etc.)
- Feedback – this domain includes five questions regarding students' ability to provide clear and non-critical feedback to peers.
- Collaboration - this domain includes two questions regarding how students handle working on a writing task collaboratively with peers.
- Awareness and self-control - this domain includes 13 questions regarding students' ability to control and change their writing given different prompts or context.

The evaluation team made slight modifications to the writing questionnaire in an attempt to simplify and clarify questions, however the overall content of each question remains the same. In addition, the evaluation team revised the response options from a *yes, no, sometimes* format to a *yes/a lot, sometimes, rarely, no/almost never* format. All questions are positively worded indicating that higher scores or averages for each domain indicate a greater ability to generate ideas, revise drafts, provide clear and non-critical feedback, as well as higher positive attitudes towards writing, and a greater awareness and control of the writing process.

Students were surveyed twice during the 2013 – 2014 academic year – once at the beginning of fall 2013 (pre-STACC 100) and a second time at the end of the spring 2014 semester (post-STACC 1A). Paper-pencil and on-line formats were used to administer surveys to students.

### Analyses

A series of repeated measures t-test were conducted to assess mean differences between pre-STACC 100 and post-STACC 1A writing skills. Pre STACC 100 and Post – STACC 1A mean differences were assessed for all six domains: attitudes towards

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writing, revising, generating, feedback, collaboration, and awareness and control of writing process. A total of six analyses were conducted. Statistical assumptions underlying the repeated measures t-test were assessed and generally met. Two domains had slight positively skewed distributions. The sample size for pre STACC 100 was 335 and the sample size for post STACC 1A was 198.

### Results

There were statistically significant mean differences from pre-STACC 100 to post-STACC 1A on three domains: generating, revision, and feedback. There were no statistically significant mean differences in attitudes towards writing, collaboration, and awareness and control of the writing process.

For the generating domain, the pre-STACC 100 and post-STACC 1A mean difference was statistically significant,  $t(188) = 2.56, p < .05$ . On average, students indicated that their generating abilities were higher after STACC 1A ( $M = 3.12$ ) than prior to STACC 100 ( $M = 2.84$ ).

For the revising domain, the pre-STACC 100 and post-STACC 1A mean difference was statistically significant,  $t(187) = 1.95, p = .05$ . On average, students indicated that their revising abilities were higher after STACC 1A ( $M = 3.25$ ) than prior to STACC 100 ( $M = 2.93$ ).

For the feedback domain, the pre-STACC 100 and post-STACC 1A mean difference was statistically significant,  $t(185) = 2.11, p < .05$ . On average, students indicated that their ability to provide peer feedback was higher after completing STACC 1A ( $M = 3.41$ ) than prior to STACC 100 ( $M = 3.01$ ).

For the attitudes towards writing domain, the average domain score was approximately 3.0 (*sometimes*) for both pre-STACC 100 and post-STACC 1A. There was not much movement from the first time period to the second time period. This same pattern is observed for the collaboration and awareness and control of the writing process domains. Average scores remained roughly the same at both time periods.

### Limitations

Results should be interpreted with caution. Without randomly assignment students to STACC or non-STACC course, it is not possible to rule out other plausible explanations that may account for the mean differences noted in the generating, revision, and feedback domains. Results do indicate however, that there may be a relationship between participating in STACC and improved writing skills outcomes. The average pre and post collaboration score was approximately 3.5 (between *yes/a lot* and *sometimes*), and the average pre and post awareness and control of the writing process score was approximately 3.3 (*sometimes*).

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### End of Semester Survey – STACC 100 Results

#### Introduction

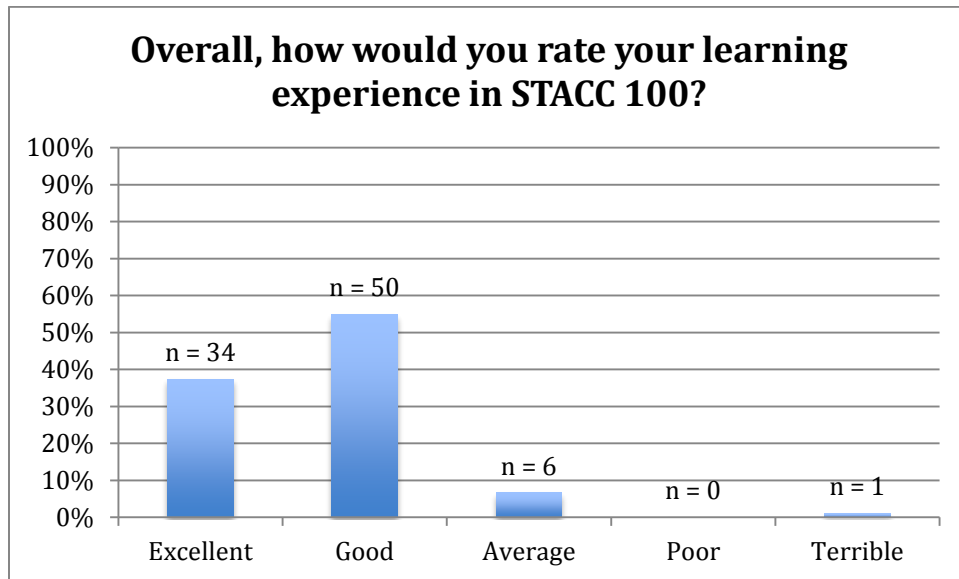
During the last two weeks of the fall 2013 semester, students enrolled in STACC 100 were asked to provide feedback regarding their academic experience in general and in STACC 100. Students were administered an 8-item survey that included both option response questions as well as open-ended questions for further elaboration. A total of 93 students completed the survey.

#### Results

Results for the end of the semester survey are summarized by question. Students' open-ended responses were stratified by response options.

#### Question 1. Overall, how would you rate your learning experience in STACC 100?

The greatest percentage of students 54.9% rated their learning experience in STACC 100 as "Good." Approximately 37% of students rated it as "excellent", with 6.6% of students rating it as "average." Only 1 student rated his/her experience as "terrible" and no students found it to be "poor."



#### Excellent Rating

Several of the students, who rated their experience as "excellent", attributed their positive experience to their instructors.

- *"Prof. Rosales makes the class fun, memorable, enjoyable and interesting while still teaching. This is great for everyone."*



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- *“Ms Kuroki is a really great professor. Not because she is easy, but because she really knows how to inspire us in building our writing and being better students as a whole.”*
- *“Professor Duran is an amazing teacher. She understands and gives you will extended the due date if necessary. She is a fair and reasonable grader. It’s up to the student whether or not they appreciate her and respect her.”*

Although the students enjoyed the class, they found the course to be challenging and a lot of work. Some students indicated that the course helped them become stronger students, particularly in English.

- *“The class help [sic] me better myself as a student.”*
- *“Progressive and paves the way for a better command of the subject”*

### Good Rating

Students who rated their experience as “good” indicated that the class was much more challenging than expected. They stated that they really enjoyed the coursework, but were quite overwhelmed by it. Students wished they had more time to complete their assignments.

- *“workload has been a lot, I felt I had too little time”*
- *“work assignments could be spreaded [sic] out. Too many assignments due at the same time, all the assignments due at the same was a little overwhelming”*
- *“Had a hard time keeping up with the work”*

One student indicated that the books were inspirational and that he/she really enjoyed the free writing. However, he/she did not feel part of the class because other students, who took the same College 1 course, were close to each other. This student also felt that the group of College 1 students had an advantage when it came to the books and class activities.

### Average, Poor, and Terrible Ratings

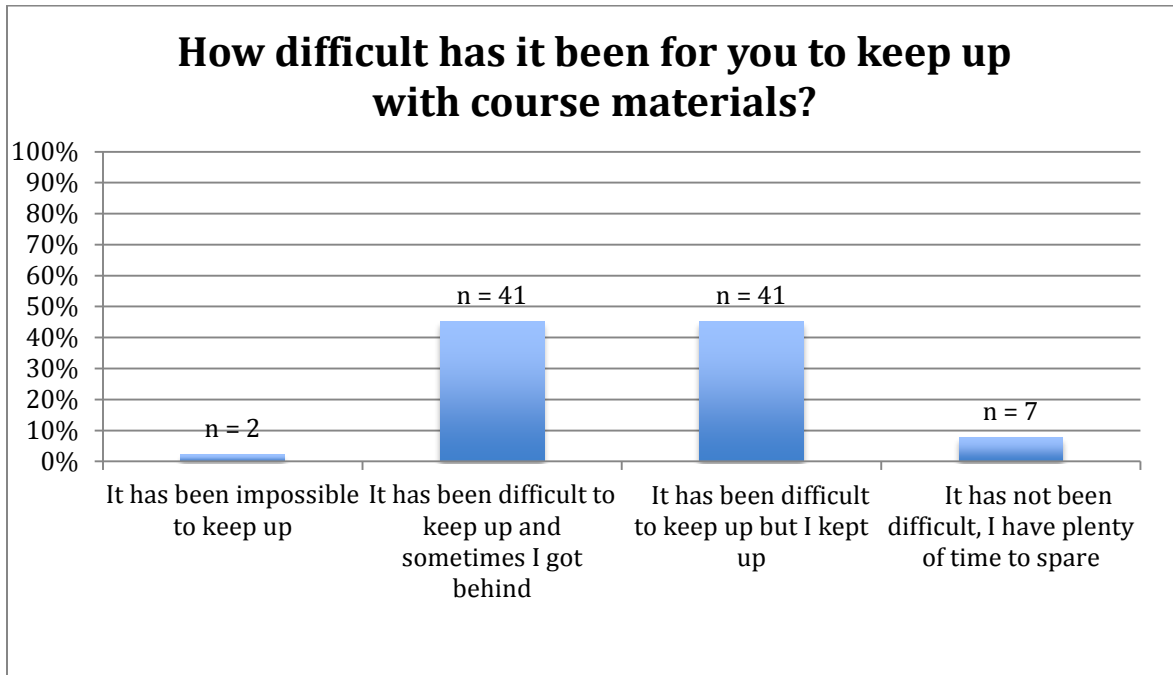
The students, who rated the class as “average”, found the class to be very tough. One student indicated that the class was, *“really accelerated.... hard to retain everything at once”*. The student who found the class to be “terrible” did not provide any comments.

### **Question 2. How difficult has it been for you to keep up with the course materials?**

Approximately 45% of students indicated that the class was difficult to keep up, but they kept up. An additional 45% of students indicated that the class had been difficult to keep up with, and they sometimes got behind. Approximately 8% of

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students indicated that the class was not difficult, and they had time to spare. Only 2% of students indicated that it was impossible to keep up with the class.



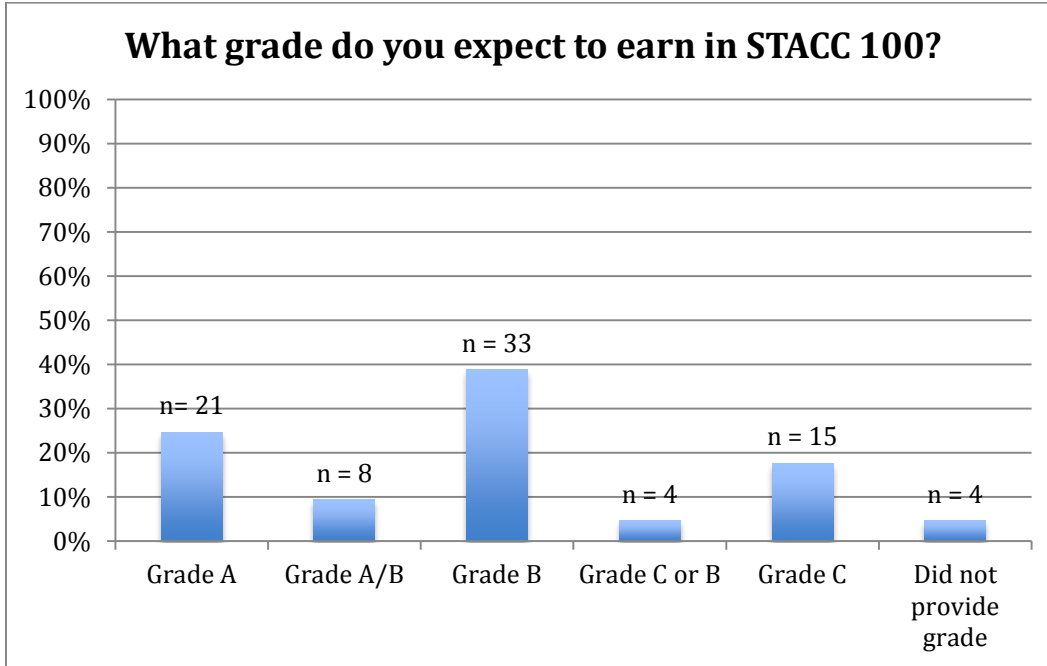
The 90% of students who had difficulty keeping up with the class indicated that the workload was too much – too many assignments were given simultaneously. Some students indicated that they could not keep up due to other challenging classes. Some indicated that they had a hard time keeping up because the course schedule was not followed, and that assignments were created last minute. A few students said they had a difficult time keeping up due to a lack of effort, time management, and too much procrastination.

- *“Too many big assignments due at one time”*
- *“...the set up course schedule was not really followed and there were new assignments created last minute or things that were supposed to be read were not discussed in class at all.. So if absent, it was hard to know what was done in class or due for homework next class, since schedule was not being followed closely”*
- *“I was lazy and there would be many occasions where I underestimated my work load and it ended up getting the best of me.”*

Only one student who found the class not difficult provided comments. This student indicated that, *“although some of the tasks may be a bit time consuming, if you just set a bit of time out of your day to complete the assignments, then it can almost always be done in one sitting.”* The students who found the class impossible to keep up with did not provide any comments.

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**Question 3. What grade do you expect to earn in STACC 100 and why? (NOTE: it appears that some students completed this survey after the semester was over and received their grade)**



Approximately 25% of students expected to earn an “A” in STACC 100. The majority of the students expected this grade because they put a lot of effort into the class. They also indicated that they turned in all of their assignments on time, paid attention in class, and participated in group activities. Overall, the students who expected an A said they worked very hard in the class.

- *“I have been working really hard in the class”*
- *“Tried really hard to do all my homework – I put in my all”*
- *“Completed all assignments and worked hard”*
- *“All assignments were handed in on time and gave full attention to the professor”*
- *“Did what was asked of them and submitted all assignments, also participated while working in groups”*
- *“Worked extremely hard and believed the work represents an A”*

The majority of the students (38.8%) expected to earn a “B” in STACC 100. These students indicated that they were unable to complete all assignments on time. They had trouble keeping up with coursework, and sometimes fell behind. Several of the students alluded to a poor grade on a project, the midterm, or the final. However, most students indicated they worked hard and did the best they could.

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- *“Fell sometimes behind because had to balance workload with other classes and sometimes felt like it was too much”*
- *“Essays were graded poorly”*
- *“I did fall behind at time [sic] and missed a lot of classes, but I tried my hardest to make up for it”*
- *“Mid-term/exam was not good”*
- *“Tried my best in the writing and completed all the work”*

Approximately 9% of students expected to earn either an “A” or a “B”. These students stated that they completed all of their assignments, but submitted a few late. These students also stated that they worked very hard in the class.

Approximately 18% of the students expected to earn a “C” in STACC 100. Most of these students admitted to not giving their best effort. Some students had trouble focusing in the class, while others indicated that they did not complete their assignments. One student indicated he/she did not give his/her best effort because even the smartest students couldn’t get an A.

- *“Did not give it my best effort”*
- *“Didn’t give it a best effort, because even the smart students could get an A. Even the ones that struggled could not achieve the grade they deserved”*
- *“Did not get the concept and did not complete assignments”*
- *“Had very little focus in the class”*

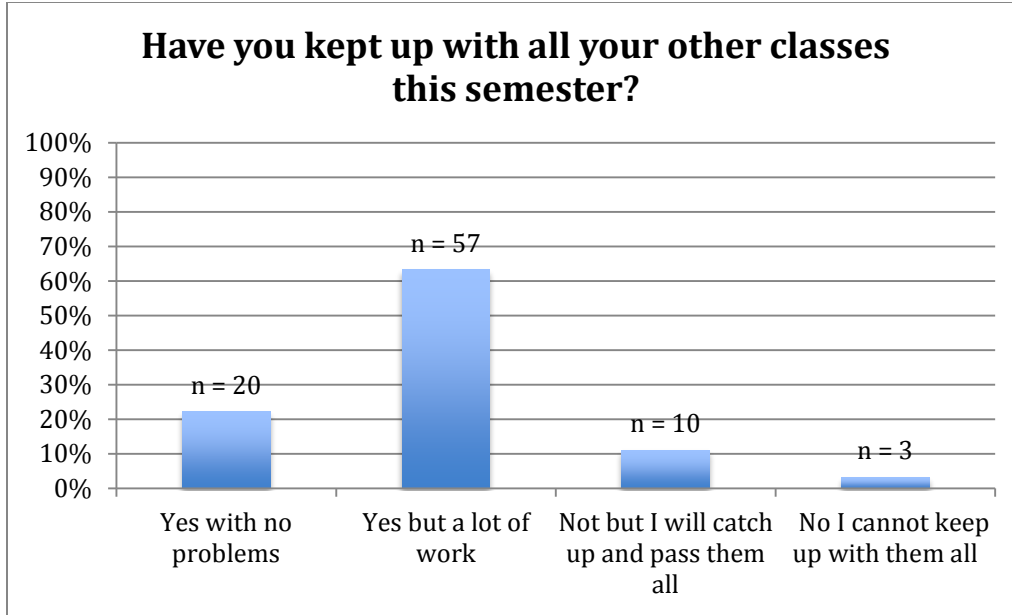
Four students expected to earn a “C” or a “B” and only 1 student expected to earn a “C” or a “D”. The few students who expected to earn a “B” or a “C” indicated that they had trouble understanding the material, and keeping up with the readings and projects. The one student who expected to earn a “C” or a “D” stated that he fell behind on work and did not have time to catch up.

Four students did not provide an expected grade. Two students indicated that they did not expect a good grade because they had fallen behind and it was difficult to keep up. One student just indicated that he/she was happy with the grade.

### **Question 4. Have you kept up with all your other classes this semester?**

As can be noted in the figure below, the majority of students stated that they were able to keep up with all their fall 2013 courses but it was a lot of work (63.7%). Approximately 22% of students stated that they were able to keep up with their fall 2013 semester classes with no problems, followed by those who said they were not keeping up but would catchup and pass all their courses (11.1%), and those who stated they could not keep up with all their courses (3.3%)

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### Yes with no problems

The students who indicated they were able to keep up with their fall 2013 semester courses with no problems tended to attribute this to one of two things. They indicated that the other courses they were taking were “easy” or they were not taking any other courses.

### Yes but a lot of work

Students provided several reasons for why it was a lot of work to keep up. Some students stated that they simply took too many units during the semester, and although they did not do great, they did not fail any classes. A few students said that their other courses were very challenging and took up a lot of their time. Other students stated that they had to work very hard to keep up with their classes, and that included “pulling all nighters” and sleeping less.

### No but I will catch up and pass them

The students who indicated that they were not keeping up with their fall 2013 courses but would catch up, stated that trying to keep up with one class caused them to fall behind on others. One student stated that he/she had to drop a class just to keep up with the English class. A couple of students indicated that personal issues caused them fall behind.

Note: The three students who indicated that they could not keep up with all their courses during the fall 2013 semester did not provide any comments.

**Question 5. Tell us about your college experience (not just in this class) this semester. How could it be improved?**

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Students generally provided two types of responses to this question. Students either indicated that their college experience for the 2013 semester was challenging or difficult or not that hard/positive.

### Challenging/difficult

Students identified several reasons for stating that their 2013 semester was challenging or difficult. Many students mentioned that poor time management and procrastination made the fall 2013 semester difficult or challenging.

- *"I could spend more time studying and working on my homework as soon as I get home instead of resting and procrastinating until midnight"*
- *"...I could use some serious time management lessons"*
- *"I could manage my time better"*
- *"I've never been the best at time management and I struggled a lot in high school in this area"*
- *"I could probably stop being a PROCRASTINATOR!"*
- *"My college experience is going pretty good now. And it could improve if I finish all my assignments on time and if I management my time wisely".*

Many students also indicated that transitioning from high school to college was a challenge and an eye-opening experience. Some of these students mentioned that college was different than high school because they were now responsible for their own learning. Other students mentioned that their college courses were challenging compared to their high school courses.

- *"This semester was semi difficult with it being different from high school. I think I wasn't aware of what I was getting myself into"*
- *"Since this is my very first semester in college, my experience was very rough because it was hard for me to get used to the way college runs. I've always had things given to me the easy way and now that I have to do everything myself, it just takes time for me to adjust...caused me to procrastinate even more than I ever did".*
- *"This was my first semester and I realized it's no joke. It's a lot harder to keep up because you don't have someone constantly reminding you to do your work...could have gone better if I managed my time better than I did".*
- *"STACC woke me up. I was used to getting by in high school, college itself was a wake up.*
- *"My college experience has been quite interesting. I have learned that it is very different from high school. What I did notice is that teachers are there for you in the same way, the difference is in high school they tried to make you do better, in college they expect you to want to try for yourself...in college your there for yourself"*

Other students mentioned that the semester was difficult because of the course load; some students were taking up to 14 units during the semester. Other students

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said trying to balance school and work or school and athletics was a challenge. A few students mentioned that they were dealing with personal issues that made getting through the semester difficult.

### Not that hard/positive

Students who stated their experience during the 2013 fall semester was not that hard or positive attributed it to self-discovery and helpful professors.

- *"It was hectic! There's no improvements needed (with STACC) just within myself. I gained a better understanding of methods that help me study and do work!"*
- *"I really enjoyed this semester I learned a lot about myself; information that will be very resourceful, convenient in the future"*
- *"I had a great experience I learn [sic] a lot about myself in the first semester to be more success [sic] for the second semester..."*
- *"My college experience has been great this semester"*
- *"It has been a great first semester. I love my teacher"*
- *"Actually this semester was one of my best semester I really enjoyed my professors. I had really good communications with all my instructor. I hope I will be the same next semester"*
- *"All my professors were great and helpful"*

### Recommendations

In terms of recommendations for improvement for the spring 2014 semester, students provided the following feedback:

- Cleaner classrooms
- Better/easier access to counselors
- Longer library hours
- Getting financial aid sooner to buy books on time

### **6. If you could change our STACC program, what would you change? How can we improve the program for spring?**

Many students indicated that they would not change anything about the STACC program.

- *"I don't think the STACC program needs any changing. It has a great mission and theres [sic] teachers with those goals in mind."*
- *"I think the program I experienced was top-notch"*
- *"I think the STACC program is fine the way it is. It gives a comfortable working environment to receive the best instructing [sic] possible"*
- *"I would not change it I think its good the way it is"*
- *"No change, it's really good! I feel like I got close to all the students and next semester I will be so open when we start class again."*

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- *"The STACC program is great. Just me that needs to work"*
- *"I really wouldn't change anything. I think the class or program is great"*
- *"I wouldn't change anything it's a great class"*
- *"I like the STACC program the way it is. I don't know what else should be done to improve it"*

Students who did provide suggestions about what to change or how to improve STACC for the spring semester stated the following:

- Spread assignments out – do not assign everything all at once
- Increase the amount of in-class projects or in-class group work
- Better class organization – provide a schedule or outline of future assignments
  - o Transition work and assignments better – don't move on so quickly from assignment to assignment
- Less group work and more independent projects
- Provide clear expectations of what is required for the class, as well as make students aware that the work load for the course will be demanding
- Perhaps those students that are in the pathways program and taking College 1 together can/should be in the same STACC class together

### **7. Are you going to change how you study and prepare for STACC 1A? What are you going to change?**

Students overwhelmingly mentioned that they intended to manage their time more wisely, plan better/ahead, as well as to procrastinate less.

- *"I plan to better manage my time. Plan a schedule. Allow myself enough time for assignments, essays, projects etc."*
- *"I'm going to learn not to procrastinate as much"*
- *"I will do the homework the very same day it is assigned..."*
- *"The things I will change is on my working habits such as do not procrastinate."*
- *"I will manage my time better because that is the main problem"*
- *"Start my essays as soon as I get a prompt, so time management"*
- *"Yes, this time once I get home I'll get to work on my homework"*
- *"I'm going to manage my time better and try to start essays and other work ahead of time"*
- *"I will try not to procrastinate and ask for help when I need it"*
- *"Time management is first on my list"*
- *"I just want to manage my time better"*
- *"Yes I will try not to wait until the last minute to complete some assignments"*

Students also mentioned that they intended to improve their reading, read more, or keep up with the readings by starting them early or as soon as they are assigned.



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- *"I'm going to improve my reading skills a little more"*
- *"Yeah, I will do more reading"*
- *"I will start reading ahead because I'm a slow reader and need a quiet environment to understand what its been read"*
- *"...I'm also going to do all my readings on time"*
- *"Yes, I will try to manage my time to finish all of my readings"*

Other students mentioned that they intended to work fewer hours and seek more assistance by visiting the writing center. Only a few students mentioned that they didn't intent to change how they study/prepare for STACC 1A. These students mentioned that what they have been doing has worked so far.

### **8. Are you finding it difficult to balance life, work, and school? If so, how can we help you prioritize your life for next semester?**

#### Yes

Most students indicated that they were finding it hard to balance life, work, and school. Students who worked indicated that doing so took time away from their studies. Most students said that they needed to be more organized, have better time management, create/use a daily planner, and stop procrastinating. A couple of students said that they would want one class period devoted to time management and creating a planner/schedule.

One other prevalent recommendation made by students had to do with the course load. Students mentioned that spreading out the assignments would be helpful. Other students mentioned that they preferred to not have an essay assigned one week before finals. A few students said that it was up to them to create balance in their life, work, and school with better time management and less procrastination.

#### No

There were a handful of students who said that they did not have difficulties balancing life, school, and work. One student indicated that he/she was okay with making school a priority over his/her social life. Another student indicated that balancing life, school, and work was doable because he/she stopped procrastinating.

## End of the Semester Survey – STACC 1A Results

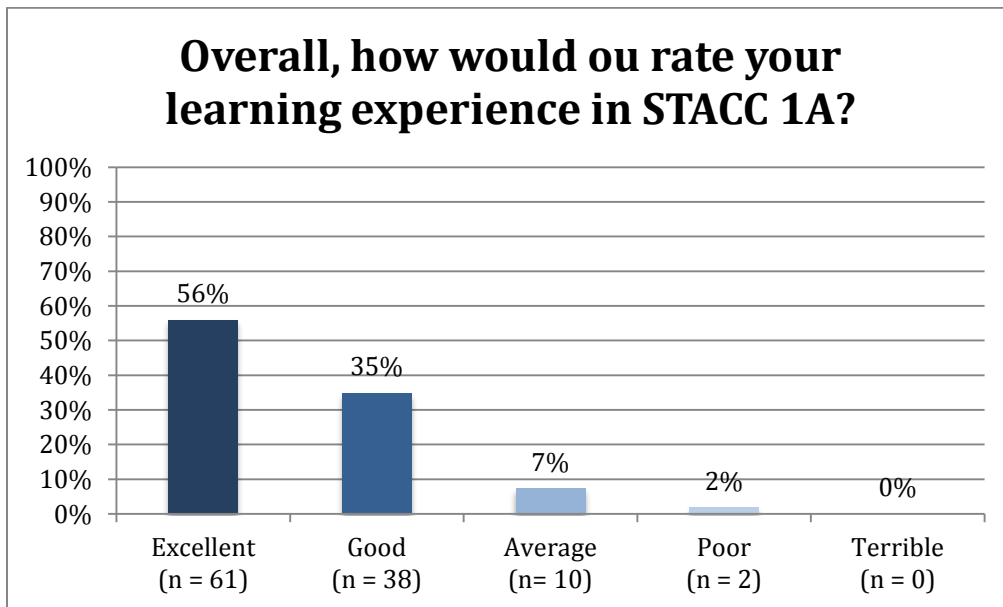
### Introduction

During the last week of the spring 2014 semester, STACC students were asked to provide feedback regarding their STACC 1A and college experience. Students were administered the same end of the semester survey they took at the end of the fall 2013 semester. Again, the survey contains option response questions with the opportunity of providing comments for further elaboration. A total of 110 students completed the survey. Results are summarized by question and open-ended responses were stratified by response options.

### Results

#### Overall, how would you rate your learning experience in STACC 1A?

A majority of students indicated that their STACC 1A learning experience was “excellent”, followed by “good”, and “average”. Approximately 91% of students rated their learning experience in STACC 1A as positive (excellent and good combined).



Students were given the option of providing comments that would further elaborate their experience in the STACC program. Students’ open-ended responses are group by rating and common themes are presented below:

#### *Excellent*

There were three themes that emerged from students who rated their STACC 1A learning experience as “excellent”.

- Instructors – many students said that their instructors explained the course material well, they were clear about assignment expectations, and

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students felt like their instructors genuinely cared about their learning and felt like their instructors really wanted them to succeed. A few students simply stated that they enjoyed their instructors.

- Growth/Improvement – many students indicated that they noticed a growth and improvement in their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Some students said that they learned strategies and techniques that will be useful for future classes.

*"It's [STACC] modified my writing to actually think outside of the box opposed to just writing to get a good grade, I would engage my own inner thoughts and I appreciate this writing class for that main reason."*

*"This class helped me understand reading and writing more and the experience from this class was just outstanding, because the teacher was so helpful and understanding."*

*"English 1A was more challenging than my English 100 class, but in a good way. We worked on several essays and went over a lot of helpful information. I really enjoyed my English 1A class because it pushed me to do better."*

- Positive Experience – some students indicated that STACC 1A was just generally a positive experience – a combination of instructors, curriculum, peers, and individual growth.

*"I enjoyed completing STACC English 100 and 1A. It has been a good experience I will never forget my journey as a reader, writer and learner in this courses [sic]. Its been a honor and a privilege to have such a caring professor and a amazing community with my peers. I will never forget my experiences in these courses."*

*"It was truly an amazing introduction into college. My professor was there to help me and I really enjoyed every minute of this class."*

*"This is one of my best experience at PCC."*

### *Good*

Students who rated their experience as “good” indicated they noticed an improvement in their abilities, however were not explicit about how or in what areas they improved.

The difference between students who rated their experience as "excellent" compared to students who rated their experience as "good" is that most the good group commented that there was too much reading, too many assignments, and generally the course was a lot of work. Students who rated their experience as “excellent” made no mention of course workload.

### *Average*

Students who rated their STACC 1A experience as "average" mentioned that the program could have been more organized. One student in particular stated that s/he

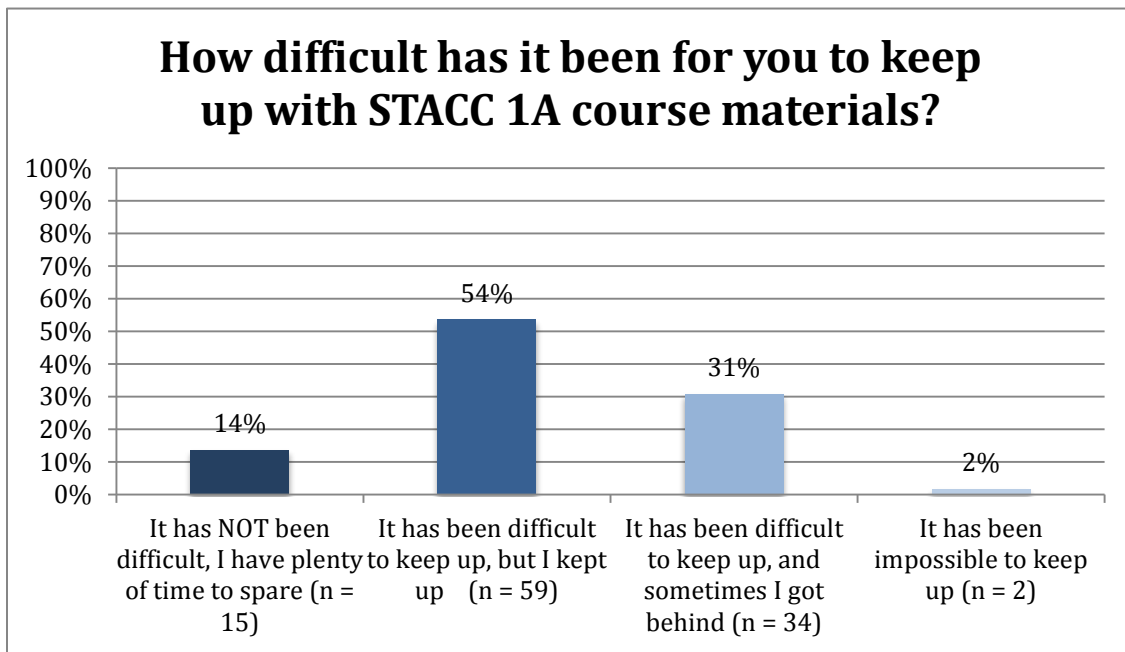
## Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

believes in the STACC goals and mission, however the class was disorganized and the instructor rushed through too many assignments. Another student indicated that the STACC pace could have been a little slower.

Students who rated their STACC experience as “poor” did not provide any comments.

### How difficult has it been for you to keep up with STACC 1A course materials?

The majority of students indicated that it was difficult to keep up but they kept up (54%), followed by it was difficult to keep up and sometimes got behind (31%). The majority of students indicated that it was difficult to keep up with STACC 1A.



Students were given the option of providing comments to further elaborate their experience with the STACC 1A course material. Students’ open-ended responses are group by rating and common themes are presented below:

#### *It has NOT been difficult; I have plenty of time to spare*

Students commented that it was not difficult to keep up for a couple of reasons: (1) assignments were spaced out in such a way that allowed for sufficient time to complete each one and (2) all required assignments and due dates were provided at the beginning of the quarter (syllabus) and they were able to plan accordingly and manage their time.

#### *It has been difficult to keep up, but I have kept up*

Students said that it was difficult to keep up but did so anyway for a couple reasons: (1) STACC courses required a lot of work and some students indicated that they

## Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

were pushed to their limits, but somehow managed to keep up with course material, (2) Some students indicated that they had a hard time keeping up because they also had a lot of work to complete for other classes.

*"There we're a lot of assignments but I did what I had to do to do the assignments."*

*"My one reservation about this class is actually the amount of work required. It is a two edged sword because I learned a lot through all of the classwork, but for a full time student it can be a bit much."*

*"You just have to keep up with the materials. I got to say, even though the materials aren't as challenging, but are time consuming. Which in the end does teach you a lot about the fundamentals of English."*

*It has been difficult to keep up and I sometimes got behind*

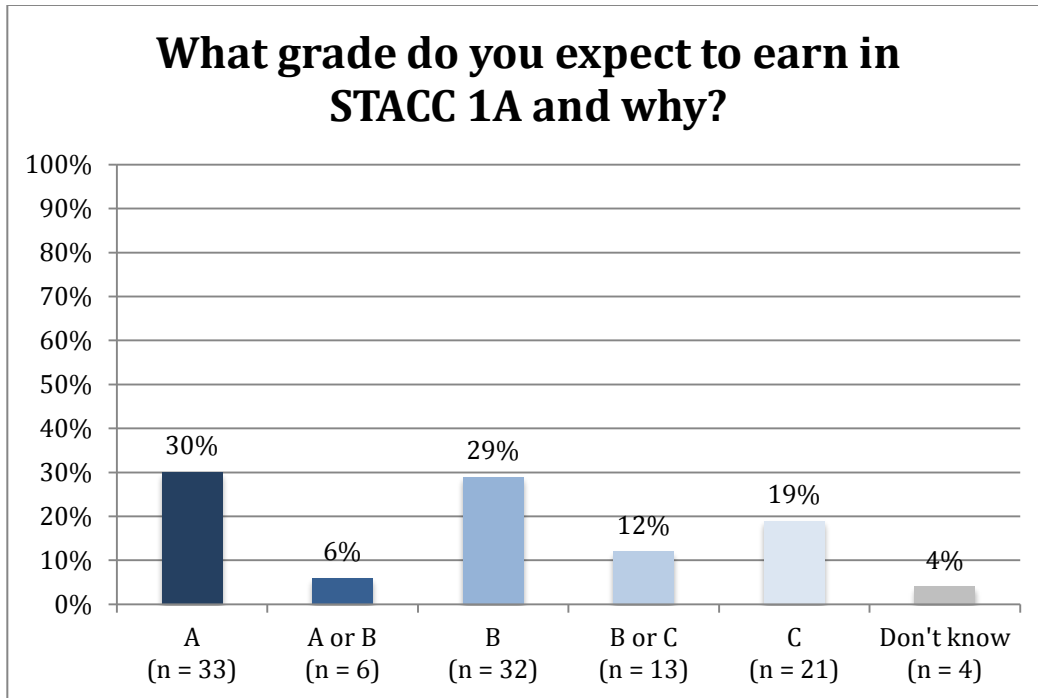
Students said that it was difficult to keep up and sometimes got behind for a few reasons: (1) they indicated that they had too many assignments due around the same time, (2) students had to juggle multiple things such as school and work or school and personal issues, (3) too much assigned reading for them to keep up with, and (4) they lacked time management skills or procrastinated too much and fell behind as a consequence.

The few students who indicated that it was impossible to keep up did not provide any comments.

### **What grade do you expect to earn in STACC 1A and why?**

Approximately 65% of students expected to earn either an A or a B in their STACC 1A class. Some students were more confident in their expectations than others and is noted in the table below. Some students said that they expected either an A or B or a B or C. No student expected to fail the class, and the lowest grade expected was a C.

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Students were given the option of providing comments that would further elaborate why students expected to earn any given grade. Responses are group by grade and common themes are presented below:

### *Expect an A*

Students who expected to earn an A in STACC 1A provided multiple reasons for this: (1) they worked hard and spent many hours on homework assignments, (2) they turned in all assignments on time, and (3) did well on essays during the semester and expected the final course grade to reflect that.

*"I expected an A in the class because I believe I went above and beyond to complete all my assignments thoroughly and to my best ability. I made sure to always make time to complete the work."*

### *Expect an A or B*

Students who expected to earn an A or a B were similar to students who expected to earn in A in one area, they felt like they worked hard and give it their best efforts. The difference between the two groups is that the "A" group indicated that they completed *all* of their assignments on time whereas the "A or B" group indicated that they completed *most* of their assignments.

*"I think I'll get a B or an A because I tried my best and completed most of the assignments."*

*"I expect an A or at least a B, I felt like I spent a good amount of thought and time in my essay's and I usually always involved in class activities and did most of the work."*

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### *Expect a B*

Students who expected to earn a B indicated that (1) they fell behind and did not complete some assignments, (2) they completed all assignments but did not do their best, and (3) some students said that they struggled with understanding and completing some assignments.

*"I feel like I might receive a B. I was expecting an A, but I missed a few assignments. If I hadn't missed them, for sure I would have received an A."*

*"I expect a B. I expect this grade because I did all the work and I don't think i did my best on it all."*

### *Expect a B or C*

Students who expected to earn a B or a C were similar to students who expected a B in that they stated they fell behind and did not complete some assignments. Some students indicated that they did not do as well as expected on their essays during the semester.

### *Expect a C*

Students who expected to earn a C made similar comments as though students who expected a "B" or "B/C". Again, they fell behind, and didn't complete the homework. The difference between students expecting a C and students expecting an "A", "B", or "B/C", is that some of the students expecting a "C" commented on their perceived lack of writing ability.

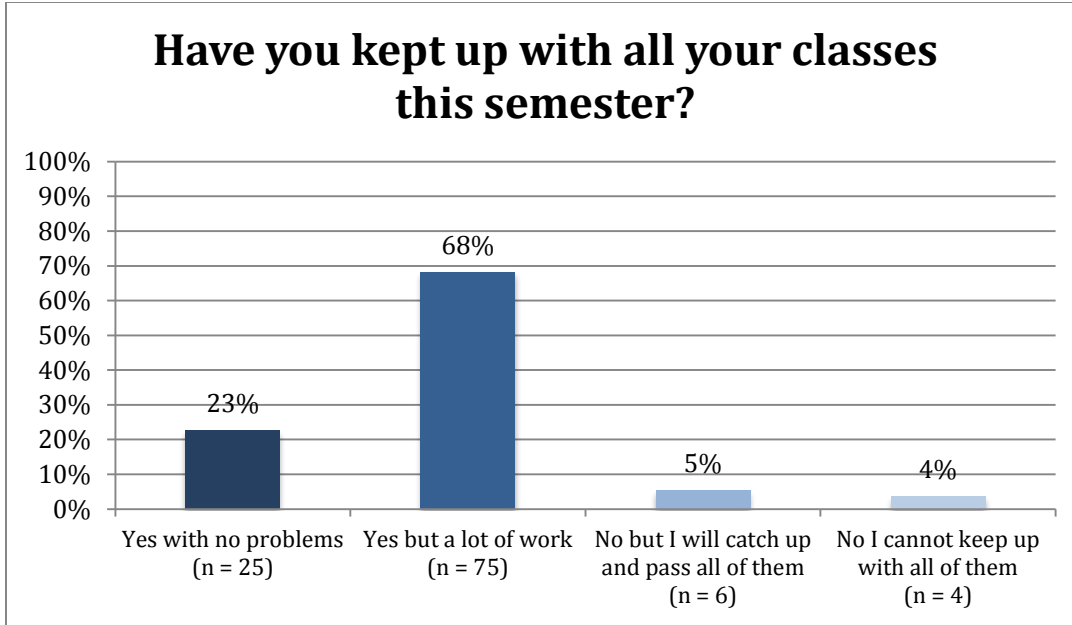
*"At least a 'C' because I have never been good at writing."*

*"I would say around a C. The class was too difficult to keep up with my writing is no good"*

### **Have you kept up with all your classes this semester?**

Approximately 91% of students indicated that they were able to keep up with all of their courses during the spring 2014 semester, however a majority of these students indicated that it was a lot of work. Only 5% of students indicated that they did not keep up with all of their classes this semester but intended to do so, and only 4% of students said they could not keep up.

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Students were given the option of providing comments to further elaborate why they could or could not keep up with all of their classes. Responses are grouped by rating and common themes are presented below:

### *Yes with no problems*

Students who said that they were able to keep up with all coursework during the spring 2014 semester said it was possible because (1) they were able to manage their time and (2) the other courses they were taking easy and not too demanding of their time.

### *Yes but a lot of work*

Students who said they were able to keep up with all courses but it was a lot of work indicated that (1) work made it difficult to keep up and (2) they took too many units during the spring semester. In fact some of these students indicated that they eventually dropped a course to get through the semester.

*"I took 16 units and later found out that I got a job. It was hectic for the whole semester, but I survived and am happy with the result."*

### *No but I will catch up and pass them all & no I cannot keep up with all of them*

There were no discernable common themes in the responses provided by the students who said they would catch up and students who said they could not keep up. A lack of common themes can probably be attributed to the fact that only seven students provided comments for both of these ratings combined.



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### **Tell us about your college experience (not just this class) this semester. How can it be improved?**

Based on the responses provided, three general themes were noted: (1) students who said that their semester was generally a positive experience, (2) students who said that their semester was hard and difficult to manage, and (3) students who did not comment on whether their semester was positive, easy, or hard, instead they commented on what areas they needed to improve to be better students, essentially answering the second half of the question above.

#### *Positive*

Students who said they had a generally positive experience during the spring 2014 semester provided the following reasons for their response: (1) they were able to manage their time well, (2) they enjoyed the courses they took during the spring 2014 semester and enjoyed their instructors (they were very helpful), (3) well in their courses, (4) met new people and made new friends, and (5) were not overwhelmed by course work.

#### *Difficult/Hard*

Students who said that the spring 2014 semester was difficult/hard provided the following reasons: (1) it was hard for them to balance school and extracurricular activities such as sports, church activities, and tutoring, (2) it was hard for them to balance school and work, (3) students took too many courses/units which lead to having a lot of school work, and (4) a few students said that they felt isolated and not part of the larger PCC community.

*"This semester I was a loner, I seriously need to put my self out there and make some new friends besides the ones in my classes."*

*"I feel like everybody is in their own world, own community, own bubble. The college as a whole doesn't make me feel like a community. Everybody just go to class, do the work make a couple of friend in class but never really contact each other outside. It doesn't make me feel united and we are all in a college as whole but rather sand on the beach here and there."*

#### *Areas for improvement*

Students provided much feedback on the areas in which they needed to improve to become better students and consequently improve their academic experience. Their comments were both on an individual level and a higher, class/institutional level.

*Individual level* – students said they needed to procrastinate less, manage their time better, possibly take fewer courses, and put more effort into their work. Some students suggested that a workshop on time management would be useful, or even tips on how to improve time management.

*Class/Institutional level* – Students indicated that they had a limited choice of courses to take because many classes were already full when it was time to register. Another barrier to course selection was timing – some students said it would helpful if there were more courses offered during the afternoon hours. A few students said that they encountered rude staff, which made them not want to seek additional services. On the class

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level, some students indicated that it would be helpful if the class were better organized, if homework expectations and due dates were more clear, and there were less homework assignments and required reading.

### **If you could change our STACC program, what would you change? How can we improve the program for next year?**

Based on the responses provided, students noted three general areas for improvement: (1) course readings, (2) assignments, and (3) class structure. A fourth theme was noted, which was the program does not need any improvement and is good as it is currently constructed.

#### *Course readings*

Students provided the following suggestions regarding course readings: (1) there should be fewer assigned reading – some students indicated that they were overwhelmed by the amount of reading required, (2) change some of the readings, (3) the STACC book did not feel relevant, and (4) some students would recommend more reading and discussion balanced by fewer assignments.

#### *Assignments*

Students provided the following suggestions with respect to course assignments: (1) less assignments – some students said that they devoted so much of their time to English 1A that they neglected their other classes and other students said that having fewer assignments would help them balance school and work responsibilities better, (2) more clarification for some assignments is needed – some students said they did not know what their instructors were looking for, and (3) a small break between essays.

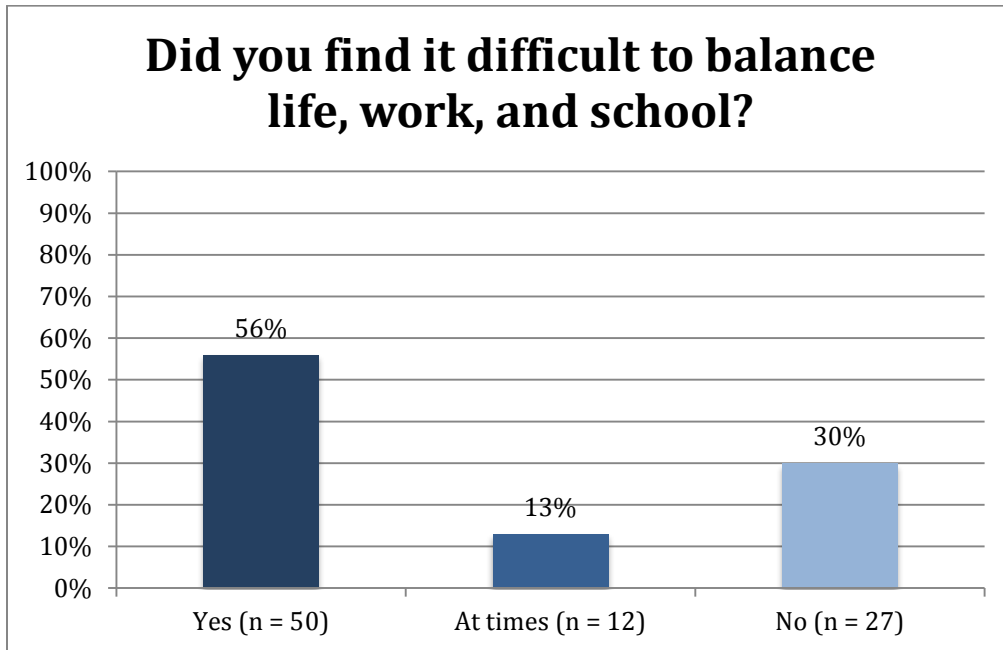
#### *Class structure*

Students provided the following suggestions regarding the class structure:

1. Space out assignments better – some students said that there were either too many assignments during the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the semester or during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the semester.
2. Drop the lab component of English 1A – students said they did not get much out of going to lab
3. Better organization of the class, at times the class felt hurried, and some students were confused about assignment requirements and due dates
4. Provide an introduction to CANVASS – some students indicated that they had trouble navigating the site.
5. More time to complete essays
6. Students who enrolled in the hybrid course recommended more in-class time with their peers and instructors because they enjoyed that interaction so much.
7. Some students voiced an interest in interacting with other STACC students – perhaps having a STACC activity or event in which all STACC students can come together.

**Did you find it difficult to balance life, work, and school? If so, how can we help students prioritize next year?**

A majority of students said that they had a hard time balancing life, school, and work. Approximately 30% of students indicated that they did not have a hard time balancing life, work, and school, followed by students who indicated that at times they had a hard time balancing life, work, and school.



Students were given the opportunity to provide feedback on how the program can help students prioritize. Responses are grouped by ratings and common themes are provided below:

*Yes*

Students who said it was difficult to manage life, school, and work provided the following recommendations: (1) fewer homework assignments (2) provide more explicit instructions on how to complete homework assignments, (3) no weekend due dates, and (4) better time management and less procrastination. Some students said that finding the balance between life, work, and school is really up to the student. Other students noted that it was difficult to balance life, work, and school, however this was expected and they just had to deal with it by managing their time better, working on the weekends, and staying up later.

*"yea it is difficult, but I don't know how to help students next year, they just have to figure it out themselves."*

*"It was very difficult but I don't think this program can help the students, they have to want to balance everything themselves."*

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### *At times*

Students who said that there were times during the semester in which it was hard to balance life, school, and work indicated that personal issues got in the way of prioritizing school from time to time. The main recommendation provided is for instructors to stress and continually remind students to make school a priority.

### *No*

Students said that they did not have trouble balancing life, school, and work because they did not work. They said they had enough time to complete all their assignments.

## Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

### End of the Year Focus Groups

#### Introduction

Focus groups were conducted during the last week of the spring 2014 semester in an attempt to gather in-depth feedback about the student experience in the STACC program. Students were asked about their STACC experience as well as their general college experience during the 2013 – 2014 AY.

A total of four focus groups, from four different STACC sections, were conducted. A total of 21 students participated – 10 female and 11 male. The following summary reflects the major themes that emerged from the focus groups.

The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of students who provided a particular response.

#### ***Think about your STACC experience, what comes to your mind as having been particularly useful or valuable?***

The most common responses provided by students were: Instructors (9), being in a cohort/collaboration (6), and STACC activities (3).

Students who identified their instructors as being valuable did so for several reasons. They stated that their instructors were responsive, provided timely feedback on various assignments, and felt like their instructors cared about their progression. Some students stated that having the same instructor for a year was beneficial because there was continuity from semester to semester.

*“Having the same professor for a whole year, you feel connected...knows what your skills are and can adapt their teaching to what you know and what you need extra help with.”*

For students who identified the cohort as being valuable did so because it created a welcoming environment, they got to know their classmates and make friends, and were able collaborate and learn from others.

Other students indicated that what they found valuable were the STACC activities. Students said that the free writing exercises helped improve their writing, and other students said that the discussion boards were helpful because they could ask questions of fellow classmates and instructors, as well as engage with fellow students on various topics or readings.

*“Discussion boards were helpful, everyone posts ideas online...get different perspectives from students”*

## Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

### ***What did you like most about STACC?***

The most common responses provided by students were instructor (6) and class structure (4). Other responses included guaranteed enrollment in English 1A, course readings, and development of communication skills.

Students said they liked their instructors because they felt they provided specific and clear feedback on what they needed to do to improve. Students also mentioned that they felt their instructors cared about their learning, were accessible and responsive via e-mail, after class, during office hours, or on CANVASS, and felt their instructors understood the delicate balance between work and school.

*“She wasn’t the easiest grader, when it came to essays she would tell me what to work on and I was clear on what I had to do...she would always be there for you”*

Other students said they liked the structure of the class. They liked having a final paper in which they could gradually build up to, it allowed them to work on their own pace and still felt like the assignment was rigorous. Another student mentioned that the pace of the class was perfect because the instructor was explicit about what she expected and would work through an example in class to further illustrate how to complete an assignment.

### ***What aspects of STACC did you like the least?***

The most common responses provided by students were no complaints (8), course readings (4), and organization (3). Other responses provided were issues with CANVASS and the research paper.

A majority of students said that there was nothing about STACC that they liked the least.

*“Nothing, everything they have done benefits you in some way”*

*“STACC as a program, there is nothing wrong with it”*

Other students said that the course readings are what they liked least for a few reasons: 1) couldn’t relate the readings, 2) there was too much assigned reading, 3) only discussed one book in class, and 4) there were no “classical” or “traditional” readings assigned.

Other students mentioned that the organization of the course an issue. Some students said that materials posted to CANVASS were either wrong or not there, and grades in CANVASS were inaccurate. In addition, some students thought the research paper was too long and found it difficult to incorporate all the class readings into one research paper.

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### **What changes would you recommend to improve STACC for future students?**

The most common response to this question was the assigned reading (4), visibility of the STACC program (4), and classroom management (3). Other responses included creating an English 1A and English 1B STACC course, and having more critical thinking assignments that would prepare students for an English 1B course.

Students who indicated that they would change the assigned readings said that more “classical” books be incorporated into reading assignments. A few students expressed concern that they are not reading the “traditional” literature that students at four-year universities are reading.

Other students said that STACC should be to be more visible or better advertised. Some students indicated that they did not know what the STACC program was before registering for their English course. One student said that his friends had no idea about STACC and when we explained it to his friends, they all said they would have probably enjoyed being in a STACC English class. Another student mentioned that information regarding the STACC program should be provided at orientation. Another student indicated that more sections of STACC should be offered.

*“Is there some kind of advertisement for the program...[perhaps] a message that you are not on your own? They should make more classes like STACC”*

Lastly, some students mentioned that there should be better class management. They indicated that there was a small group of students in their classes who did not appear to care, did not contribute during group work, and generally did not put forth much effort. Students hoped that the instructors would have reminded these students of their purpose in the class and the purpose of college in general.

*“They need a reminder of why they (students) are here, they are more focused on fooling around and not taking things seriously, and that can be disruptive”*

### **What did you like most/least about having a cohort?**

All students indicated that they enjoyed being part of a cohort for many reasons. Students said that the classroom environment was positive; they felt like they could open up and share more than they did in other classes, and enjoyed getting to know their fellow classmates. Students also indicated that they were able to rely on each other – keeping each other aware of due dates or any changes in assignments.

*“It was a fun experience getting to know students for two semesters. Seeing them again, you feel comfortable around them, asking questions, letting them know when things are do. A class for one semester, you don’t get as comfortable with other people, don’t feel comfortable asking them questions.”*

Some students indicated that while they enjoyed being part of a cohort there were some issues that made working with the same group of people difficult at times. Some students said that it was hard to “call out” students who were not

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participating. Other students expressed the same type of frustration, saying that they felt they had to take on more responsibility than others when it came to group work. One student said that because his other classes were not cohort-based, the transition from cohort to non-cohort was going to be difficult.

### **What challenges did you encounter (if any) that made it hard to persist and complete your work?**

Some students indicated that managing work and school was difficult at times because managers or supervisors were not very understanding of their school schedules. Other students indicated that it was hard for them to manage their time and indicated that time management was something they needed to work on.

### **What advice would you give a future student who is thinking about enrolling in STACC next year?**

Students provided the following advice:

- Take the class seriously
- Manage your time wisely
- Keep on top of the readings because it will otherwise be difficult to complete assignments and do well in class.
- Be organized
- Be aware of deadlines and write them down
- Stay on top of the work because it is very easy to fall behind

All students indicated that they would encourage other students to enroll in a STACC course.

*“I would say do it. It’s better to have the same class the whole year rather than not knowing what class you are going to get the following semester”*

*“You build a relationship with the teacher, you grow more as a writer, as a student. You connect with her [instructor].”*

*“If it wasn’t for this class I would just be living, but now if there is something that really ticks me off, I know I can write, speak up”.*



## Stretch Accelerated Composition (STACC) Evaluation

### CONCLUSIONS

A significant majority of students indicated that participating in STACC was a positive learning experience. Students attributed their positive experience to many factors including their instructor, collaboration with their peers, having a cohort, being in a welcoming environment, class activities/structure such as gradually working towards a final essay, free-writing, and discussion boards. Students also mentioned that they noticed an improvement in their writing and reading skills.

Many students indicated that STACC 100 and STACC 1A were challenging courses that required a lot of work and dedication. Most students said they were able to keep up with all the work but it was a challenge because of other commitments such as work, personal issues, and other demanding courses. Despite the workload and juggling other commitments, students said they would recommend STACC to other students. All students expected to pass STACC 100 and STACC 1A and attributed this to completing assignments and working hard.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the data presented above and in some instances based on casual conversations with STACC instructors throughout the academic year.

- Provide students with time management tips/advice in class or perhaps a workshop– many students indicated that they needed to work on time management to help balance life, school, and work
- Review assignment sequence and due dates – students said that assignments felt rushed and there was little to no time between assignments/essays.
- Remind students of why it is important to read diverse bodies of literature – some students expressed concern that they did not read the “classics” that other students at four-year institutions are reading and feel that they will be at a disadvantage when they transfer.
- Provide some sort of introductory activity or exercise at the beginning of STACC 1A – students who were new to STACC and entered at the 1A level said it took them a couple of weeks to orient themselves to class and their peers.
- Make the STACC program more visible. Some possible options include: (1) providing STACC information during orientation, (2) providing STACC information during summer pathway jams, or (3) providing STACC

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information to counselors in some way so that they can inform students about the STACC option available to them.

### LIMITATIONS

For the writing skills questionnaire results, other plausible explanations of mean differences cannot be ruled out, as students were not randomly assigned to participate in a STACC vs. non-STACC class. However results do indicate there is a possible link between STACC and better writing outcomes. In an effort to strength internal validity of these results and to assess if these results are consistent over time, future evaluation efforts will make use of a matched comparison group to assess how STACC students perform compared to non-STACC students.

For the writing skills questionnaire there was a significant drop off in participation during the second survey administration. In addition, the number of students who responded to the end of the semester surveys did not account for the majority of STACC students. Generalizability of results presented above may be limited.

The evaluation team and STACC coordinators are currently working together to ensure that the next round of data collection (2014 – 2015 academic year) will include a larger sample of the STACC student population to strengthen the generalizability of findings. Links to on-line surveys are being provided prior to the start of the semester and included in curriculum modules. Instructors will be provided with a data collection timeline and access to the survey links during the August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 STACC retreat. E-mail reminders regarding data collection will also be provided to instructors by the evaluation team.